Ike Challenged To Veto 'Reasonable' Education Bill

Washington –(CQ)– Federal aid-to-education bills face a crucial hurdle this week as the House of Representatives begins debate on this controversial issue. What action the House finally takes will determine whether an education bill will be enacted in 1960.

The Senate Feb. 4 passed a bill (S 8) authorizing federal grants totalling $1,856,060,000 over two years to help build schools and boost teachers' salaries. The Senate bill is not at all to President Eisenhower's current liking. Congressional Democrats hope the House will approve a bill similar to one the President backed in 1957 but now opposes and that Senate and House differences will be quickly ironed out.

Then, they relish the prospect of sending a "reasonable" bill to the President and daring him to veto it.

Irreconcilable Positions

The 86th Congress began with the Administration and Democrats in seemingly irreconcilable positions on how far the Federal Government should go to bolster the states' ailing educational systems. But the Administration's approach – helping school districts pay off the costs of long-term construction bonds (debt service) – is virtually out of the running; and Democrats–who favor some form of direct Treasury grants – have trimmed their proposals considerably, cutting them from $4.4 billion annually in the original Murray-Metcalf bill to $325 million a year for three years in the Thompson bill coming to the floor this week.

There is still a question, however, whether the President would sign a bill providing any kind of grant aid, particularly one that might allow federal funds to be used to supplement teachers' salaries.

Major Proposals

Following are the alternative proposals the House will consider:

Thompson Bill – Deliberately patterned after the President's 1957 requests, HR 10128 would authorize $325 million a year for three years in federal grants to the states for school construction only, with the states required to match federal funds 50-50 in the last two years. States would have the choice in the second and third years of using the federal funds for direct grants or debt service. Sponsored by Rep. Frank Thompson Jr. (D-N.J.).

Senate Bill – S 8 authorized $1,856,060,000 over two years. No matching funds were required for the first year, but states would have to raise their own school expenditures by fixed percentages averaging 2.26 per cent to receive aid the second year. Funds under the Senate bill could be used for school construction or teachers' salaries or both.

Zablocki Bill – This would add to the Thompson bill a provision for loans to private and parochial schools at an interest rate of ¼ of 1 per cent more than the Government pays to borrow money. Sponsored by Rep. Clement J Zablocki (D-Wis.).

A key issue in the House will be whether, like the Senate, it should approve federal aid for teachers' salaries. President Eisenhower Feb. 12 said he could not "imagine anything worse" than the federal Government being in "the business of paying a local official." Many Catholic groups oppose teachers' salary aid for public schools because they fear it would handicap parochial schools in the competition for teachers. And the National Education association argues that a bill requiring state matching funds but limited to school construction would hurt teachers, since the states would use money ordinarily earmarked for salary increases as part of the construction matching funds.

Under the education aid bill as passed by the Senate, Oregon would receive $19,267,000 from the Federal Government over two years. The Thompson bill as sent to the House would give Oregon $9,849,000 over three years.

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